DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 428 990 SO 029 622

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TITLE Civic Education in China: Past, Present, and Future Challenges.
PUB DATE 1998-00-00
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Historical Materials (060)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Citizenship Education; *Civics; *Democracy; *Developing Nations; Elementary Secondary Education; Ethical Instruction; Foreign Countries; *Student Development
IDENTIFIERS *China; Civic Values; Gettysburg Address; Lincoln (Abraham); Mao Zedong; *Political History

ABSTRACT

The traditional Chinese language held no term corresponding to the western idea of democracy. In the Confucian tradition the emphasis was entirely on people's obligations to society and the country, not on rights. The idea of democracy was brought to China early in the 20th century. Dr. Sun Yat-sen, founder of Chinese "bourgeois democracy," put forward the three principles that became the core of the basic content of civic and moral education in schools during the Nationalist period. These principles, adapted from Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address," were nationalism, democracy, and people's livelihood. The Communist victory in 1949 led to the formation of The People's Republic of China which believed in the class struggle as well as rapid industrial development. The core of Mao Tse-tung's version of civic education was loyalty to Mao. The Chinese leadership after 1978 realized that the development of a market economy and political and legal systems that attend a market economy requires democratic and law-related education. In 1988 objectives, still current in Chinese schools, were devised for the moral education of all students. But frequent political campaigns and ideological debates have greatly influenced official civic and moral education policies. Currently, the education of a fully competent citizen requires training in critical and creative thinking. Also, more emphasis is placed on patriotic education as a part of civic and moral education. A national system of village elections is in progress. The transition to a democratic and law-governed society requires consciousness of citizenship and a knowledge of democracy on the part of the individual. Contains 11 references. (BT)

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by Liu Guohua

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CIVIC EDUCATION IN CHINA: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

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I. Civic Education in the Past.

In traditional Chinese, there was no term corresponding to the Western idea of democracy. Moral education in ancient China simply stressed people's loyalty, obedience, and obligations to society and the country, which was the representative name of the emperor. In the Confucian tradition, the emphasis was entirely on obligations, not rights. Rights were therefore neglected.[1]

The idea of democracy was brought to China early in the twentieth century. During the May 4th movement in 1919, the idea of democracy was used as a weapon to fight against the long tradition of China's feudal past. Dr. Sun Yat-sen, founder of so-called Chinese "bourgeois democracy," put forward the three principles that became the core of the basic content of civic and moral education in the schools during the Nationalist period. These principles were "nationalism," "democracy," and "people's livelihood." They were adapted from the famous ending of the Gettysburg Address, where Lincoln referred to government "of the people, by the people, for the people." Thus, "nationalism" meant the national self-identification of the people; "democracy" government by the people; and "for the people" Sun identified as for the sake of the people's material well-being, their livelihood.

While these three principles furnished the basic substance of civic education under the Nationalists until 1949, Chiang Kai-shek's government added other content appropriate to the Kuomintang's political doctrine and interests, such as anti-communism, hostility to the Soviet Union, and the desirability of one party rule.

The communist victory in 1949 led to the formation a new nation, the People's Republic of China and brought to power a so-called "workers and peasants party" which had learned its political and military tactics in the countryside. It had adopted Marxist ideology and believed in the class struggle as well as rapid industrial development. Because of inexperience in overseeing what was conceived as a transition to socialism, the party leaders turned to the only government with such experience—the Soviet Union.

Western hostility to the People's Republic of China promoted the Sino-Soviet relationship. China borrowed models for both the economic and the political system from the USSR. Chairman Mao Tse-tung exercised unlimited power within the highly centralized government that came to power and turned the political system into a form of personal rule. Political campaigns continued until Mao's death in 1976. What passed as ideological, political, and moral education was little more than primitive indoctrination. The core of this version of civic education was loyalty to Mao Tse-tung, the idea of class struggle, and the goal of fostering a future transition from "socialism" to the Marxist Nirvana "communism." Clearly, such "civic education" was not appropriate for the training of citizenship.

II. Civic education today.

The Third Plenum of the 11th Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee held in 1978 marked the beginning of a new age of economic and political development in China. The adoption of reform and the ensuing open door policy toward foreign trade gradually turned China in the direction of a market economy. The reformers, led by Deng Xiao Ping, tried to reduce the level of political coercion in Chinese society. The range of things considered political was narrowed. CCP leadership also made concerted attempts to restructure the leading bodies in both the government and the party. New Constitutions and laws were adopted. The idea of the building of "socialist democracy" (conceived as recognizing the people as master of the country) and its legal system were put forward by CCP leaders during the mid-1980s. The CCP leaders also put forward the notion of a preliminary stage of socialism. This notion legitimized the development of a market economy by placing the achievement of communism in the distant future, with the present a merely preparatory period. This was important because prior to this time society was conceived as being in a stage of socialism from which communism was perhaps a few short steps away.

The Chinese leadership realized that the development of a market economy and a political as well as legal system that attends market economy requires democratic and law-related education. The younger generation was also thought to need patriotic education at a time when they seemed to be losing faith in their country. After all, the whole of the Chinese past and its traditional culture had been denounced for years during the Cultural Revolution.

An even more important cause of youth's lack of faith in their country had come about after 1978, when the Chinese government initiated an "open door" policy that allowed foreign influence to enter the country. This was at first restricted to cultural artifacts such as film and music; but later, in the 1980s, foreign books and therefore ideas were allowed entrance as well. Having been instructed in the superiority of their country, Chinese youth discovered China's poverty after exposure to Western standards of living as depicted in the cinema.

According to Liu Bing (Liu Bing, 1997),[2] the vice minister of the State Education Commission, the content of civic education was first put into the ideological and political curriculum in secondary schools when the law of compulsory education became effective in 1985. In May, 1986, the State Education Commission issued an education document entitled "Teaching Outline of Ideo-moral Education in Whole Day Primary Schools." The document specifically addressed the need for moral/ideo-political education, which included the teaching of patriotism, collectivism, communist ideals, and concepts of socialist democracy and legal system. The main objective during this period was to train the successors to socialism who would trod the path to communist society.

In 1987 scholars and school teachers had a debate on the objectives of moral education in the schools. One school of thought argued that the objective of training those who would live in communist society was not realistic at the present preliminary stage of socialism. The objectives of moral education during the period of compulsory education should foster the development of citizens with the following qualities: patriotism, self-

discipline, and respect for law, public morality, and civilized behavior. The ideas of this school of thought were accepted by the CCP Central Committee.

In 1988, a major document on moral education was issued, entitled "Notice on Reforming and Strengthening Moral Educational Work in Primary and Secondary Schools" (CCP Central Committee, 1988). The document puts forward totally new objectives for moral education for all students. Two levels of objectives, still current in Chinese schools, were devised. The basic level requires training students in the qualities just mentioned. The second and higher level involves an attempt to enlighten students by intensifying their consciousness of communist ideals, such as unselfishness and public-regarding behavior, as well as faith in the coming existence of a communist society. The latter level is not required of all students, only the most advanced. The suggested content includes patriotism, collectivism, and socialist democracy, which in practice means the structure and process of the Chinese political system, along with education in disciplined behavior and character building. The document shows on increased emphasis on civic education within the overall category of moral education, though no critical thinking or participation skills were mentioned in the objectives.

The June 4th,1989, incident led to the stepping down of Zhao Ziyang, General Secretary of the Communist Party, who had shown sympathy for the students and refused to support the party's violent crackdown. It also led to an immediate call for a halt to what the government perceived as Western-inspired attempts to promote a "peaceful evolution" to "bourgeois democracy." Their contrary policies were accordingly called

"anti-peaceful evolution." This call influenced official civic and moral education policies; patriotic education was greatly stressed in documents published the following year.

In April, 1990, the State Education Commission published "Opinions on the Further Strengthening of Moral Education Work in Primary and Secondary Schools" (State Education Commission, 1990). It condemned the influence of what it termed "bourgeois liberalism" and theories of "peaceful evolution" from abroad. While reiterating the need for education for patriotism and collectivism, the document also stressed the need for cultivating students' capacities of self-management and self-education as well as an integration of collectivism and the expression of individual character in the collectivity.

Despite the official labeling of the June 4th student demonstrations as "riots" and so-called "bourgeois liberalization" being hostilely labeled as "peaceful evolution," the moral education documents that appeared in the 1990s seem to carry on the previous thrust of openness and a reiteration of the principles of an educational system in which principal responsibility is decentralized. This can be seen in the state council's "Outline of Educational Reform and Development," published in February 1993; in the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee's publication of the next year, entitled "Some Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Moral Education Work in Schools"; and in its 1995 publication, "Implementation Outline on Patriotic Education."

"National Standards for Ideo-political Subjects for High Schools" and "National Standards for Ideo-moral and Ideo-political Subjects in the Nine Year Compulsory

Education System" were separately issued in June 1996 and March 1997. The content standards replace the teaching outline previously used. The Content Standards are concerned not only with what content should be taught, but also with the basic requirements for student performance. The Standards sets forth three performance requirements, which are identification, understanding, and application of the subject matter. "Critical thinking" is not mentioned. But the education of a fully competent citizen requires training in critical and creative thinking.

As to the content of the primary school Standards, civic, moral, and character education involves the threading throughout ideo-moral subjects of a set of principles known as the "five loves." These are love of the motherland, the people, labor, science, and socialism. What, one might ask, is meant by "love of socialism"? This is not an easy question to answer, since the notion of socialism is continuously changing. Before the inauguration of a market economy, it had the classical meaning of public ownership of the means of production. But now its meaning is vague, and amounts to little more than support for the party and the government.

The main content in junior high school concerns mental health and character building in the first year; law-related education in the second year; knowledge of Marxist ideas of human social development in the third year; and in the fourth year, the basic situation in China regarding the nation's economic, political, and social condition. The content in high schools includes, in the first year, basic concepts of economics; in the second year, Marxist philosophy; and, in the third year, a course on politics, that includes the structure

of the Chinese government, the relationship of citizens and the country, political parties and the party system in China, national and ethnic minorities, religions and their role in the country; international relations and Chinese foreign policy; and principal world issues.

Since 1978, the Chinese government has given top priority to economic development and to assuring the stable domestic environment necessary for the government to achieve its goal of modernizing the country. Taking a page out of classical Marxism, the political system and its accompanying ideology, however, have lagged behind economic reform. The conflicts between economic reform and political control have caused frequent political campaigns and ideological debates, such as the critique of "critical realist" writers; "anti-spiritual pollution"; "anti-bourgeois liberalization"; and "anti-peaceful evolution" (which is to say, anti-creeping liberal democracy) campaigns. These campaigns negatively influenced social stability and retarded economic development. Thus, Chinese leaders are in a dilemma, caught between the requirements of economic reform and those of political control, the same dilemma faced by Mr. Gorbachov in the 1980s.

These frequent political campaigns and ideological debates have greatly influenced official civic and moral education policies. As the campaigns and debates arose, officials repeatedly stressed ideological education. In this situation, certain obsolescent ideological concepts remain undiscarded, which in turn influence the effectiveness of civic and moral education.

Today, more emphasis is placed on patriotic education as a part of civic and moral education. The influence of Marxism is diminishing among the Chinese people, although it still has a place in school education. As Professor Joseph Chan of Hong Kong University has argued, "Today, while China remains officially committed to Marxism, it has become no more than a kind of lip service. China is in a moral and ideological crisis."[3] After the destructive period of the Cultural Revolution during which nationalism lost its legitimacy to Mao's zealous version of Marxism, the waning of Marxism in post-Maoist China has left a spiritual vacuum. To rebuild a sense of national identity, a new emphasis on nationalism became a primary strategy to shore up internal political and moral cohesion. Accordingly, patriotic education is placed at the head of civic and moral education. But this patriotic education does not consist of extreme nationalism. Rather, it emphasizes the ancient character of China's history and culture, the tragic period of China's past in the 19th and first half of the twentieth centuries, and progress toward national regeneration made under communist rule after 1949. Traditional Chinese virtues are greatly encouraged.

This curriculum, however, leaves something to be desired. In the concept of civic education operative in China today, democratic and law-related education is insufficiently stressed. If civic education can be defined as political education in a narrow sense, political education in China mainly introduces the present political system and Deng Xiao Ping's theories on the construction of China's particular version of socialism. Basic principles of democracy are neglected. Because of the history of feudalism in China, democratic consciousness is weak. Therefore the development and enhancement of

democratic and law-related education is required to turn China into a democratic and law-abiding society.

III. Challenges Facing Civic Education Today.

In closing, let me survey the Chinese situation today and look at what lies ahead for civic education. Chinese political leaders have fully accepted a market economy after Deng Xiao Ping's famous series of remarks the subject in 1992. In recent years, private businesses, village and town-owned enterprises, and foreign companies have developed more quickly than state-owned enterprises. The financial system is attempting to keep pace with economic reform. Stock markets are rapidly developing. A large number of state enterprises became partially privatized when stock in them became publicly available. Foreign banks are now allowed to do business in China. A market economy now dominates.

There is a sense of political movement in China. Laws which protect certain rights of citizens have been put into practice. Independent attorneys are allowed to practice law. As *The New York Times* reported in March of this year, individual Chinese have begun to sue police for wrongful arrests, and have even won some cases. An unlicensed press dealing with the stock market is emerging in Shanghai, spurred by investor demand for dependable market news. And semi-autonomous consumer and environmental groups are mushrooming, heralding the advent of civil society in China.

It is notable that a national system of village elections is in progress. Although these elections are initiated by the Communist party to recruit better people to manage villages and increase prosperity, villages are clearly becoming empowered. As Professor Larry Diamond, who observed this year's elections, has remarked, "village elections are one indication that China is entering a phase in which individuals, groups, villages, and enterprises, are beginning to be able to independently express their interests and concerns, under the umbrella of party rule. That is the beginning of liberalization—when you have multiple points of power and interests and everything is not dictated from one hegemonic center." [4]

The more positive changes that the Fifteenth CCP Central Committee held in 1997 set forth the goal of building a highly democratic and law-governed society. Recently, Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan announced that China will sign the "International Treaty on Citizen Rights and Political Rights" in early October 1998.[5] Thus, I believe that China is in a transition to a democratic, law-governed society.

A market economy and democracy go hand in hand. But a market economy is not the only foundation of democracy. The transition to a democratic and law-governed society requires consciousness of citizenship and a knowledge of democracy on the part of the individual. In other words, an understanding of democratic institutions and processes and of fundamental democratic values and principles is another and essential foundation of a democratic society. Without this foundation, China risks falling into chaos as the current

system undergoes transformation. Renewed and revitalized civic education in China is therefore an urgent task.

NOTES

[1] The author wishes to express his thanks to Dr. Charles Bahmueller, who contributed advice and editorial services to this paper.

[2] Liu Bing, "Promoting the Consciousness of Citizenship in Schools," *Guangming Daily* (Beijing), July 23, 1997.

[3] Joseph Chan, "A Confucian Perspective on Human Rights" (unpublished manuscript).

[4] Thomas L. Friedman "China Votes: Here Comes The Sun", *The New York Times*, March 19, 1998.

[5] Tang Jiaxuan "The Multiple Developments Put New Energy Into International Relations," *People's Daily*, Overseas Edition, September 25, 1998.

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